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EPA enters into agreement with Chevron to investigate soil contamination at uranium mine on the Navajo Reservation

SAN FRANCISCO -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reached an agreement with Chevron USA Inc. to investigate radium-contaminated soil at the Mariano Lake Mine site, a former uranium mine located on the Navajo Nation near Gallup, New Mexico. The agreement is the latest result of an ongoing effort by EPA and Navajo Nation to address contamination from the legacy of uranium mining in the Navajo Nation.

Under the agreement, Chevron will conduct a radiological survey and sample radium-contaminated soil throughout the 31-acre Mariano Lake Mine site and surrounding area, including 10 residences and two nearby water wells. Chevron also agreed to pay EPA's oversight costs.

"This investigation is part of EPA's commitment to help the Navajo Nation deal with the significant impacts of historic uranium mining," said Jared Blumenfeld, Administrator for the Pacific Southwest Region. "We are working to make sure that every responsible party takes the steps needed to protect Navajo families from radioactive contamination."

Ben Shelly, Navajo Nation President, said, "On behalf of the communities in and around Mariano Lake, I extend my sincere appreciation for the agreement today between the U.S. EPA and Chevron. I look forward to the data that will be generated in this investigation, and I respectfully request U.S. EPA to understand our desires for the most protective clean up plans that will help restore harmony in our communities and homes. This type of agreement will continue to help us as we work to correct the harmful legacy of past uranium mining and milling on the Navajo Nation."

EPA and the Navajo EPA will oversee field work, which will include construction of a fence and application of a sealant to contaminated soils where people live, work and play while the investigation is carried out. The order also requires Chevron to post signs, lock gates and prevent livestock from getting into areas of known contamination prior to cleanup.

The Mariano Lake Mine site operated as a uranium ore mine from approximately 1977 to 1982, and includes one 500-foot deep shaft, waste piles, and several surface ponds. Exposure to elevated levels of radium over a long period of time can result in anemia, cataracts, fractured teeth, and cancer, especially bone cancer.

Chevron is the fifth responsible party that EPA has required to take actions at former uranium mines on the Navajo Nation. EPA's work with Navajo Nation to identify and enforce against responsible parties is part of a 5-year plan to address the problem, which can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/region9/superfund/navajo-nation/>

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